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ABSTRACT

Information exchanged between people is a renewable expanding resource that can contribute to human growth and development, and the new technology of videotape offers an excellent vehicle for that exchange. Traditional forms of information exchange or communication used in human development work are limited in many ways, and a more positive approach to development communication involves the following principles: (1) equality exists between sender and receiver, signaled by the willingness to listen as well as talk; (2) people must be accepted as they are and spoken to on that ground; (3) communication must deal in feelings as well as thoughts; and (4) telling the truth is essential. Videotape technology is ideally suited to serve these principles, and its value was demonstrated in the development of a small format video program that was produced to qualitatively evaluate the results of family planning in Indonesia. Program production involved representatives from both the family planning program and the television network in each of Indonesia's 15 districts, with local Indonesian women exchanging their views on various methods of birth control. (AEA)

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MAKING SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH HUMAN EXCHANGE

Listening Moves More People Than Telling

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Martha Stuart

20 August 1980

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Several years ago I made a videotape in Romania where a United Nations Population Conference was being held. My crew for the production was Romanian and we had very little language in common. Mostly our exchange involved a lot of pantomime leading to a "yes" or "no" response. More precise distinctions were impossible.

Because the project was small and over quickly, this inability to reach exact understandings was never particularly fateful, though it was repeatedly frustrating in small ways. After the production was completed, I wanted to show the finished tape to the women leaders who had participated in the program. An evening showing was arranged with the proviso that if an anticipated event interfered, the screening would be postponed to another time. Of course I wanted the crew to come too. But there was no way I could make a flexible arrangement with them over the language barrier. It was either come or not come. In the end, I decided to have them come, hoping the screening would not be rescheduled. I was lucky and it wasn't.

The Romanian experience impressed on me the lesson that poor communication forces us to deal in absolute alternatives. There is only the choice between yes or no, on or off, go or no-go. All the gradations in between are lost. Understanding is minimal. No wonder computers, which only deal in sequences of yes or no choices, frequently prove incapable of dealing with individual human circumstances. Good communication enables you to deal in variables. You can talk about the <u>whys</u> of things as well as the <u>whats</u>.

Unfortunately, I think we must classify most of the communication that attends development work as poor. It tends to limit choices rather than expand them. The scale is so huge, however, that the costs of this poor communication far, far exceed the mere inconveniences of my Romanian example. Instead of a few individuals possibly wasting an evening's time, this is waste measured by the lost growth and productivity of whole populations.

Why do the traditional forms of communication used in development work operate poorly and at high human cost?

First and most visibly, development communication is usually a one-way flow. It proceeds from the top down, from the government to the people, from the expert to the implementer, from the central authority to the local outpost from the educated to the uneducated, from the city to the countryside. One might call this the down-and-out principle of communication--and the echo of impoverishment is entirely accurate and appropriate. This process assumes that all knowledge, authority, understanding and resources are located centrally and can be dispensed according to stipulated bureaucratic procedures. Presumably nothing of value exists to travel in the other direction. The transmitter of information, in this view, is the unquenchable source of truth; the receiver exists only to accept and act on the transmitted truths.

A second characteristic of development communication is its reliance

on the written word. This arises from the bureaucratic necessity that everything be put into writing before it can be considered either formally passed along or permanently recorded. It leads in turn to the report conceit, which assumes that once an experience has been committed to words and placed in a report, then it has officially been made available for replication elsehwere. The report becomes the primary reality and the situation from which it was abstracted, the one comprised of real people and real events, is consigned to a paradoxical shadow reality. This turns upside down the familiar Biblical proclamation that the word was made flesh and dwelt among us; in development the flesh is routinely made into words. Needless to say, this orientation makes literacy the ground rule of the development game--without it you cannot be a player, only a pawn.

The third characteristic of development communication follows from the first two: it is the blueprint fallacy. This is the attitude that communication exists to tell people what to do. By this reasoning, communication provides the means by which those in power educate, direct or manipulate those people who are the object of the development effort. The people, in fact, are little more than targets at which policy-makers throw information decked out as instruction. Success is measured according to whether people do as they have been told; no one is particularly concerned with ascertaining whether they have been told the <u>right</u> things or not. That part is taken for granted. The plan rules, not the local reality.

Overall this adds up to plain poor communication. In the end, it is always some version of a single choice: do it or don't do it. There is little provision for feedback or course corrections. There is little effort to encourage alternatives or options or innovations. The point is not to raise questions but to deliver answers. It is business conducted by pure yes-or-no accounting.

The liabilities of communication in this mode are both operational and philosophical.

The record shows very clearly that this style of communication does not work very well to transfer human experience from one locale to another. The endlessly recurring disappointment in development work is the seeming impossibility of transporting a successful project from one village or province or country to another. Seedlings of human enterprise are extraordinarily delicate. Usually the transplant withers and dies; if it survives, it is often because it grows in an unexpected direction.

Communicating human experience in this fashion is not simply a matter--as the conventional approach has it--of separating the wheat from the chaff, committing the seed to written reports, and then scattering these words on likely soil. Most of the time the procedure succeeds in preserving and transporting nothing more than handfuls of chaff. The spirit of the thing is somehow left behind, lost in the process

of abstraction. It is hardly a surprise that nothing grows.

This perceived operational inability to deliver the goods is no doubt why communication projects fare so poorly with funders. Not only do funders tend to avoid communication projects per se; they also slight the communication aspects of the projects they do fund, especially the matters of evaluation and pass-along. But the failures that have given rise to this skepticism are not inherent to communication itself, just to the way it has traditionally been conceived and pursued.

The ability to transfer successful human experience from one area of the world to another is at the very heart of the development effort. It provides our only hope for extending scarce resources across the chasm of need. We simply cannot afford to do everything over from scratch all the time. We need communication that can transport results from place to place. Without that, we have nothing. Even with unlimited money, there would not be enough program designers and designs to get the critical ideas concerning birth control and farming methods and nutrition and so on to all the people who need to know these things in order to improve their lives. The need is vast enough to swallow up all the policy-makers in the world. The only thing that possibly can meet it is a communications approach that gives people tools and ideas and the experiences of others and then invites them to make their own solutions.

Right away this involves a different view of human nature from that assumed by the ccnventional model of communication, which holds a very narrow and distorted picture of human potential. That model of communication undervalues the people being "developed," treating them more as objects to be moved than as collaborators to be met. Its assumptions are reminiscent of the colonial hauteur that would deign to help the poor natives becom. more like us. It encourages the false and debilitating view that a woman who pounds grain by hand to make flour cannot be wise, or that a woman who has never drawn hot water from a tap cannot have dignity.

Because people are not stupid about how others regard them, the communication that operates according to these principles puts people's backs up. It makes them far more likely to think of the reasons why they cannot do what is recommended than why they can. It may be much more effective at creating resentment than change.

Conventional development communication approaches people at their lowest level--the fear of authority and power--rather than at their highest--the exercise of their creative functions. This is not only bad pyschology, it is out of step with contemporary realities.

The world as a whole is moving away from authority/control forms of governance and toward information/choice forms. This is evident in the family, where strict role definitions are being replaced by more democratic kinds of interaction. It is evident in the relations

between men and women, where individual choices are dictated less by biology than by what each partner desires for him/herself and for the relationship. It is evident in business, where workers now sit on board of directors. At the growing edge of nearly every sector of society, there is a new regard for people sharing information and perspectives in order to arrive at mutually satisfying choices. We are learning how to listen to the people with whom we are in partnership.

Applied to development, this means that instead of telling people what to do, you elicit their involvement. At first glance that looks like a much more difficult, unwieldy, unpredictable and inefficient way to proceed. It may indeed be all of those things. But it is also the best way to arrive at solutions in which people are willing to invest their energies and their futures. Development has to be based on shared concerns--whatever is on the mind of the people themselves is just as important as whatever is on the agenda of the central authority. Ultimately development is--or should be--teaching people that they can design their own lives and then giving them tools which help them do that. A psychic balance is preserved; people are giving and taking at the same time.

If you can find out what things have the most meaning in a person's life, and give him or her the experience of making decisions about these things, then you have given this person a genuine control over his/her own life. By this "empowerment," you enable the person to

go on to do much, much more than if you had merely "convinced" him or her of something in the traditional manner. People change more deeply and more happily as a result of a concrete experience demonstrating where their advantage lies than as a result of an abstract argument to that effect.

In communication terms, this means seeing information not as a means to control but as the raw material of choices. Communication is not a matter of one-directional delivery of finished goods in the form of policies and directives. It is a multi-directional network that sends raw materials in many directions at once, assuming they will be assembled into different products in different locations. The image is of an open marketplace with lots of word of mouth exchange as opposed to a dispensary line where all the goods are standard issue and announcements are carried by loud-speaker.

This is the kind of communication I do. It offers an alternative model to the standard form of development communication, one that operates from the belief that you make social change by fostering human exchange.

The new style of communication can be distinguished from the old in several particulars. The first principle of this new communication is equality between sender and receiver; for a true act of communication to occur, both parties are equally important to the transaction,

neither can complete it alone. The most obvious signal of such equality is the willingness to listen as well as talk.

The idea of listening seldom occurs to development people working in huge countries like Indonesia or India because scale alone makes the undertaking seem so hopeless. How do you listen to a population of such size? It can be done, as I will show a little later on. What it requires is first, commitment, and second, a different mental set. It also helps to have the right technolgy, but technology alone is not the answer.

I sometimes wonder if the current rash of kidnappings and hostage-holding everywhere in the world is not an indication of the lengths people feel they have to go to in order get the attention of the people in power. Once the so-called terrorists have our attention, they mainly want to be heard. While policy analysts in Washington say that the Iran situation reflects on the status of our military might and level of respect in the world, I would say it shows what poor listeners we are.

The second principle of the new style of communication has to do with starting wherever people are. You don't have much in the way of mutuality when you constantly require people to accept your assumptions before they can join your conversation. If communication is truly to make connections, it must find people where they live and speak to them on that ground. Consider the common disjunction between many

development personnel and the constituencies they serve. The development officers live in urban areas where most of their information comes through the media rather than through other people. Their relationships with their neighbors are superficial. They do not work with their hands--nor in many cases do they have friends who do. These people frequently enter village life prisoners of their own orientations, expecting the change processes to operate the same way they do in the environment they know. As a result, they rely on an intellectual approach where a visceral approach is needed.

This leads in turn to the principle that communication must deal in feelings as well as thoughts. The traditional style of communication was forever trying to sanitize things by removing any vestige of emotion or feeling. But feelings by and large offer a much stronger and more trustworthy way to identify common concerns than thoughts; generally changes in feelings are what makes changes in thought possible. Organizations do not deal in feelings; individuals do. We need an approach to communications that can bridge that gulf.

The final principle of the alternative communication philosophy concerns the willingness to deal in truth. The temptation exists in any political activity to be more concerned with how things look than with how they really are. But if development efforts are to succeed on any significant scale, they must be pursued with larger motives than political safety or public relations. Communication

that attempts to deal in images rather than truth is eventually strangled in its own lies.

Truth is more, I should add, than the mere avoidance of lies. It requires active effort. It involves getting behind stereotypes. It means looking beyond the immediate moment to long-term effects. It includes opening yourself to the other person's truth as well as your own.

Fortunately there are leaders in the world who are beginning to understand that their power comes from encouraging exchange and communication rather than from attempting to control what people think and do. They are open to truth-telling in a way that traditional leaders seldom were. They feel it is good to know something is wrong so you can fix it; and it is good to know something is right so you can spread it.

What makes this alternative communication philosophy I am describing truly powerful is the fact that there is a technology available that is ideally suited to serve these values. That technology is videotape. Video communication can be multi-directional, person-centered, locally-originated, and feeling-sensitive. Because it is simple to understand and operate, relatively inexpensive and durable, it can also act to democratize communication activity in a profound way.

Video's unique strength is that it does not require central processing the way film, print, television and practically every other medium does. So it opens up many different kinds of horizontal exchanges: material produced in one place can be taken and shown directly in another place with no prior necessity of going back up a pipeline to a central laboratory or clearinghouse. The freeing potential this affort is simply enormous. The central sources everywhere are on overload; at best they are difficult places to exchange ideas. Video allows and encourages direct communication from woman to woman, from doctor to doctor, from village to village.

Videotape is also an exciting new kind of literacy tool. It provides a means for sharing ideas and experiences over distance among people who neither read nor write. It puts in their hands a way of extending themselves, of sharing what they know, that was just never before possible. Video technology gives the oral tradition a new electronic life.

Videotape remains under the user's control, so he or she can take in unfamiliar or threatening material at a comfortable rate. A videotape can be played over and over again, it can be stopped in the middle and restarted, it can easily be rolled backwards and then forward again--all flexibilities that help to make it an ideal personal learning tool used either individually or in small groups.

Because videotape can serve as a straightforward recording medium, it gives the viewer direct access to an event without any intermediary

subjectivities filtering the experience, the way a newspaper reporter, teacher, TV newsman or messenger would do. No intervening experts, brokers, or interpreters are needed. The viewer can see what is happening for him/herself, deal with it, confront it, integrate it on a personal basis. The viewer also has access to the full feeling-tone of what transpires, not just a disembodied record in words alone, pictures alone, or edited snatches of both together. In short, people can trust and act on a videotape record of an event, discussion, meeting or decision-making session in a way they could not if they were dealing with someone else's pronouncements about what was happening.

Of course videotape cannot by itself magically reshape the quality of communication anywhere. Like any technology, it is only a tool. In the hands of a person who needs to keep control, it will produce nothing out of the ordinary. In the hands of a person who enjoys watching other people grow, and who sees videotape as a means to inspire people and draw out their creativities, it will honor specific circumstance in a way no other medium can.

When the technology and the desire for democratic communication are sensitively and creatively joined, phenomenal things can happen. Small-format or portable videotape, used in combination with national television, can stimulate an unprecedented degree of exchange within a country, giving people of diverse cultures, circumstances and backgrounds a way to know each other. When a government does not think

of the broadcast air as a resource to be carved up into small pieces like the land, and when it respects its citizens' capacities to be initiators of ideas about themselves and their ways of life, communication can become an incredibly exciting and important kind of nation-building--not in the xenophobic sense of jealously protecting national perogatives but in the joyful sense of finding and exploring people's similarities and differences.

Many developing countries, quite wisely I think, are indicating that they do not want to adopt the Western models of national communication systems. They want the benefits of technology, of course, but in ways that will complement rather than compete with their own traditions. They also want to develop in ways that will establish them as "learning" cultures on their own, rather than as "nursing" cultures fastened to the tit of Western commerce. Videotape--especially in conjunction with broadcast television for wide dispersion--is proving to be extraordinarily attractive to leaders looking for alternative systems of national communication. In this respect, video stands at the forefront of an emerging global communications revolution.

A Case in Point

A theory, of course, is no better than its practice. Application is always a matter of specifics. So to show how the principles of the new communication philosophy can be embodied in a concrete way, I would like to give a detailed report of my work with videotape in Indonesia

over the past two years. The Indonesian case study builds on international work with videotape as a development tool that I have been doing for over a decade. But as the most recent, large-scale application of these principles, Indonesia has a vividness and freshness that some of the earlier work no longer does. And Indonesia itself is a fascinating country, large enough to experience the enormous difficulties of bringing development to a huge population dispersed over an archipelago of islands, yet not so disillusioned as to believe the task is neither manageable nor worthwhile.

My contact with Indonesia began when the people at the Ford Foundation office in Jakarta sent the deputy chairman of the family planning program to see me, a man named Dr. Haryono Suyono. Haryono was preceded by his reputation as a communications genius. Family planning in Indonesia works to a degree unprecedented anywhere else. Haryono's special contribution has been to create lines of communication that began in countless small apsaris or women's groups in each locality, and extended upward through villages, groups of villages, regions, provinces, finally culminating in the national ministry for family planning, the B.K.K.B.N.

Haryono's approach, which provided for discussion at every stage or level of organization, had helped bring about a dramatically large and rapid shift in traditional habits and attitudes concerning birth control. Even more impressive, these changes were documented in a statistical reporting system that functioned admirably well. On a later visit to Indonesia, I was struck by how well institutionalized the family planning idea had become when I saw a blackboard in the central building of the

small village of Kelidan in Bali announcing the following information about the community's composition:

2000 chickens
11 temples
233 elcos (couples eligible for birth control)
183 acceptors (couples using some form of birth control)

Despite these marvelous successes, Haryono had several concerns when we sat down together. For one thing, Haryono and his colleagues knew a great deal quantitatively about the family planning program--who in what village was practicing what form of birth control. But they did not know much about the whys. Why were some people so committed? Why were others not participating? Why were people dropping out? Why would people decide to change their minds and/or habits? In trying to get answers to these questions, Haryono had been running himself ragged going to feedback sessions all over the country meeting with individual groups. He was interested to see if videotape could help provide feedback on a larger scale and with more effectiveness than was presently possible. He also wanted to find ways for the family planning program to get on the air in Indonesia, so they could avail themselves of the reach of broadcast television and thereby bolster their lagging urban program.

In this first meeting we talked at some length about my series of

videotapes called ARE YOU LISTENING and about the powerful impetus for social change that can be provided by ordinary people talking about their own attitudes and experiences. By the example of their own discussion, they can encourage others like themselves to come to grips with information and perspectives that might otherwise be too threatening to face. Especially if the discussion is open and honest, dealing with personal ambivalences and granting different personal situations and backgrounds, the effect is to legitimate the issue under discussion. A surprising amount of information can be communicated in this non-directive manner. And if change is embodied in one's peers, it seems more familiar, more immediate and more understandable then when it is the program of some distant or abstract authority.

At the end of this first meeting, both Haryono and I were excited at the possibilities videotape seemed to offer the Indonesian family planning program, though the programmatic approach was still very much up in the air.

Next I went to Indonesia myself, where I visited a number of villages and listened to what was going on there. This exploratory process was very exciting and invigorating. I was fascinated by the differences I saw. Indonesia is not one culture, but many cultures coexisting in a shifting relationship of isolation and mutual enrichment. Because it was colonized for hundreds of years, Indonesia blends a very deep sense of its own traditions with a surprising degree of Westernization. The effect of all these cultural cross-currents had been to establish the

Indonesians as people used to learning from each other. I began to perceive some of the human dimensions of how communication worked in the country.

When I first arrived in the country, I thought I might prepare a broadcast-quality ARE YOU LISTENING videotape with women who were using birth control, and then conduct a brief workshop in small-format videotape. But after exploring the country for a while, I wanted to do more than that. I saw so many uses for videotape, and so many potential program topics, that I wanted to put much more emphasis on the workshop in small-format video, so I could leave behind an on-going capability to use the technology to enable people in the country to speak to one another across the boundaries of distance and cultural difference.

This ripple effect could extend my own activities a hundredfold--or even a thousandfold.

As I traveled and talked with people, women expecially, I was extremely interested in the ways the generations were teaching each other. With family planning in particular, there was a reversl of the usual pattern of older teaching younger. Here the younger generation was teaching the older--and with a degree of love and respect that made it touching to witness. And because there was no denial of tradition, there was less fear of change. Seeing the unusual quality of this generational exchange, I was convinced that the most powerful ARE YOU LISTENING program I could prepare would be with Three Generations of Javanese Women.

I was also impressed by the dignity with which the Javanese and Balinese dealt with their sexuality. Everywhere I went, loving someone--physically as well as emotionally--was accepted as an important and valid aspect of life. The security provided by this loving connection contributed a great deal to people's self-esteem. If they had this, they had one of the most important things life could offer. This attitude comes through clearly in the refreshing sexual frankness of the videotape program on Three Generations of Javanese Women.

In other countries where I have worked to establish videotape as a development tool it has usually proved impossible to involve the national television organization in our activities. Typically the television people are full of the values promulgated by Western television. They are concerned with glamor and fanciness and have little use for small-format videotape. I suspect that some of this resistance stems from the fact that the television people frequently feel they are already in over their heads because they have the latest equipment but lack the training and expertise that would allow them to employ it to its fullest extent.

In any event, the Ford Foundation was willing to sponsor me on a second trip to Indonesia specifically to encourage Indonesian television, TVRI, to work with the Indonesian family planning program. I was successful in this mission, but partly to my efforts and partly to a fear among Indonesian television people that their grip on information technology in the country was slipping somewhat. The Japanese government had

recently given the B.K.K.B.N., the family planning bureau, a small-format video studio along with 400 recorder and playback units. Suddenly the B.K.K.B.N. looked like a rival network. That was enough to make the television people willing to join in our project.

My plan was to run a workshop where we could bring together the family planning people and the television people from each of the 15 districts in the country. Possibly this would result in a lasting synergy, with much more long-term effect than simply getting the television people reporting what family planning was doing. I wanted to get the two groups working together to explore how a new combination of technology and attitude could enable them to communicate throughout the country in different ways than before. So we designed a two-week workshop with 15 B.K.K.B.N. people and 15 TVRI people.

In the course of touring TVRI facilities, I saw they had a training center and this seemed an ideal location to run the workshop. It would also permit the ARE YOU LISTENING crew to demonstrate some of the finer points of the television equipment that was new to the Indonesians.

In terms of financial resources, the workshop was made possible by grants from the U.S.A.I.D., the Ford Foundation, World Bank and U.N.F.P.A. There were also contributions of technical consultations from SONY and of equipment and training from J.I.C.A., Japanese A.I.D.

But the workshop was really made possible by the help and support of

Brent Ashabranner at the Ford Foundation, who believed in person-to-person communication; Haryono Suyono, who understood the power of communication especially as it related to family planning issues; and Thomas Rees of A.I.D. who was excited about hearing from people who are endlessly talked about but rarely listened to. In turn, each of these men was working with a man who got the idea of what we wanted to do right away--as the Minister of Health, Suwardjono, said, "Let the people talk to each other." This understanding and support made our job a lot easier. Indeed, given the number of different entities and perspectives we were working with, the workshop project itself required a good deal of communication and exercise of cooperative spirit!

When the workshop finally convened, in addition to the 30 television and family planning people, there were several additional participants from non-governmental agencies. Also a number of observers passed through the workshop during its two-week course. The workshop began with some theoretical discussion about the uses of videotape as a development tool, but quickly moved on to give the participants some hands-on experience with the technology itself. None of the participants had ever worked with small-format video before. The most interesting aspect of the workshop was to watch people who had been skeptical or even defensive at the beginning slowly change their minds and their attitudes as they worked with the equipment and the ideas.

The workshop group made 10 videotape programs with titles such as; "Hopes of the Street Cleaners," "Youth," "Doctors," "What Are They Saying?" Two of the participants--both from the family planning bureau

exhibited unusual fluency with the equipment; one was a near-genius with the camera, another at editing. A music producer from one of the television districts who initially did not want to be at the workshop and who made clear that his attendance was under duress, by the end was totally involved and made a beautiful videotape on fishermen.

The workshop process familiarized the participants with all the equipment involved in producing small-format video programs. But beyond that it sensitized them to the different ways video technology could be used as a tool of human exchange. We attempted not only to give them mastery of certain basic video equipment and production procedures, but to give them a new perspective on communication.

At the end of the workshop, the ARE YOU LISTENING crew came out and we made the program with Three Generations Of Javanese Women. The production demonstrated how one can also make a broadcast-quality studio videotape that cleaves to the same values we had pursued with small-format video. All of the women on the tape came from two remote villages. The women had never before ridden on an elevator or escalator or seen a building with more than one story, much less seen the inside of a television studio. The conventional view holds that women from such rural, economically limited backgrounds lacking in formal education have little of value to say to other people. Yet by the end of our taping, these women had covered a great deal of important ground about the status of women and women's development in Indonesia. One of the participants phrased their

conclusion this way: "Women shouldn't just be listeners or observers, they should be equal partners. This program will benefit women in the villages by showing them that women have valuable things to say and should be heard. This will help contribute to the success of all sectors of women's development."

Every time I show the program I realize anew how much more powerful, exciting and convincing it is to hear from the people who are actually having the experience rather than to hear it retailed through others, reporters or experts, no matter how sensitive or sympathetic. No one who sees this program can doubt that the issues of women's development have penetrated to the most rural and isolated areas of the world--where they are being dealt with creatively and humanely with the intent of expanding the potential of individual lives. There are few messages more heartening or hopeful.

As pleased as I was with the program and the forthright way the women spoke, in the process of editing I saw how absolute honesty can cause unease in those who have not been schooled to honor it. For the editing I was accompanied back to New York by two representatives from the B.K.K.B.N. and TVRI. These two men were immensely helpful to me and understanding of the values I worked by, yet I could feel them squirm a little when one of the women on the tape said, "We don't use birth control because the government chases after us, but because we like to make love!"

Later in the tape, one woman gives a long narrative of her own experiences

with birth control. She had problems with every type of birth control: the pill gave her high blood pressure; she hemorrhaged with the IUD; she and her husband thought the condom was a joke because it got in the way. So the husband had a vasectomy, deciding this was the best form of birth control they could practice under the circumstances. My Indonesian colleagues, however, were quite uncomfortable about having this sequence in the final program because Indonesia, as a country with a large Muslim population, has not been advocating vasectomy as a form of birth control. They also feared that the women's catalog of negative experiences with birth control would prevent others from trying these methods.

Finally I just had to say that the responsibility was mine, they did not have to worry so much, and that in fact they were approaching the whole situation with a kind of defensive sensitivity that signaled fear rather than confidence. But their reaction was typical of much of the thinking that goes on within government and other organizations throughout the world. It assumes that to mention something is to advocate it. Or it assumes that something that happens to one person will suddenly happen to everyone. Or if I do something, it amounts to telling you to do it. It is an attitude that exhibits awfully little respect for the viewer's capacities of discrimination. In years of encountering this reaction and trying to understand it, I can only conclude that it arises from a lack, on the part of those who are fearful, of an adequate sense of psychological differentiation in their own lives.

Once the editing was completed and the program in final form, I returned

to Indonesia. Although no one in Indonesia seemed to feel as strongly about it as I did, I wanted very much to show the program first to the women who had participated in it. That meant traveling to their two remote villages.

My first day in the country I got as far as Blitar by evening, where a celebration was scheduled. The celebration began with a wayang, a very simple but elegant performance that involved nearly 1000 wooden puppets and runs from 8 in the evening until 5 the next morning. In a way, the wayang is like a group psychodrama or psychoanalysis because the puppets represent every imaginable personality and mood. The performance gives people permission, in a sense, to feel whatever they may have felt or be feeling. It is a kind of confirmation or validation process, and that is why everyone stays up until 5 a.m. just loving it. The only thing I can think to compare it to is the American soap opera.

The next morning the formal part of the celebration began and I joined approximately 500 people for breakfast in the community meeting building. After a while I noticed that only men were speaking, the men occupied all the positions of authority. Even in the area of birth control, men were exclusively the spokespersons. Suddenly I got very nervous about the problems I may innocently have created for the women in the tape. Their outspokenness could, I thought, rupture many of the norms that structure village life.

As quickly as I could I made arrangements for a jeep with portable

video playback equipment and left the next day for the first of the two villages where the participants in the program lived. My emotions were mixed: while I was proud of what I had done, I was also worried that it might cause problems for the women who had been so open and helpful on my behalf.

When I got to the first village after a four-hour drive, the gong that serves as the community call was struck and the people began to assemble. As the tape was shown I was anxious to gauge its reception. After a few minutes my trepidations were put to rest--the lurah or village leader, who was also the husband of one of the participants gave me a thumbs-up signal of approval.

After this showing we departed for the second village, where a higher echelon of leadership was convened, including the bupati or regional governor. Within a few minutes after the second screening had begun, the bupati was laughing heartily. I asked what amused him. He said, "That woman just said something very nice, something a man likes to hear. She said that even if she didn't have birth control she would have 8 children again because she enjoys making love."

When the program was over the bupati was generous in his praise. He described the program as a contemporary wayang, helping women see different women, saying and feeling different things, and functioning as spokespersons. After all, he concluded, birth control is working because of women, not men.

From here I returned to Jakarta and showed the program to a number of other groups. I was struck by how the reactions shifted as I moved further away from the people and into organizational structures.

The head of the Women's Bureau in Indonesia (who screened the program with her five male deputies) said she loved the program and asked to present it at the Women's Conference in Copenhagen as a kind of "poem" from Indonesia.

The population planning division of the A.I.D. office responded very positively to the program. On man said it gave him goosebumps and made him feel his work was worthwhile.

At first, the television people got very nervous when they saw the program and the frankness of the discussion. They were quick to say that only film, not videotape, could go on television! Now I hear they are planning to air it.

From my point of view, the most curious and revealing reaction came when I screened the program for a group of foundation people and funders in New York, most of them involved in population planning work. After watching the program attentively, they made the following comments:

"Well, Martha, it worked just because you are so charismatic."

"How come they didn't look poorer?"

"Are you sure the family planning people didn't just trot out their success stories for you?" (In fact, and of course the participants were chosen by me.)

"They didn't talk about death." (I bit my tongue and resisted observing that they didn't talk about pizza either.)

Having thought about it since, I think this group's discomfort with the program was based on a feeling that they had lost control. The women in the program made birth control and the decision to use it seem easy and natural, whereas these planners were used to thinking of it as a substantial education/communication effort. Suddenly here were local women saying, in effect, that people don't resist change so long as there is something in it for them. That whole orientation was foreign to this group of planners.

I would also venture that, being used to communication in the old style, these planners were taken aback at how personal and frank the discussion was, at how rooted in individual circumstance it was--and therefore how insensitive to broad-scale social planning goals it no doubt seemed. They were put off, in short, by how intimate the discussion was, not only in substance but in style.

But I would say that the most productive way to approach development is a community effort analogous to the relationship between a man and woman.

If you are really making love, you never think about who is winning and who is losing, who is controlling whom. You want truth, you want learning, you want growth, you want true mutuality. You want to explore the full relationship in living, learning and loving. Intimate honest discussion is a prerequisite to building any such relationship. With love, you can take in what another person is saying even if you don't agree with it. With love, you can understand how you both can be <u>right</u> about something and yet still think of it differently. And with love, you discover that you can both feel differently about something and still work it out so you are both satisfied, so that neither has triumphed over the other.

I use video technology to apply what happens between individuals to much larger groups of people. The magic is not in the thing itself, the loving exchange which most of us have had the fortune of experiencing in our lives. The magic is in the ability to manifest this exchange among otherwise disconnected groups of people. This is what videotape in the service of the communications goals described here can accomplish. It is quite a remarkable phenomenon, and one that holds great promise for aiding human development.

The price of this approach, quite frankly, is discomfort on the part of those who still think about development communication in the old mode of authority/control. These people will not always hear what they expect to hear. They will get some surprises and some of the surprises may be unpleasant. Unfortunately, planners hold it as an article of faith that

any surprise is bad. That just is not so. No learning ever occurs without expectations being violated. And if these planners were willing to think of themselves as students as well as teachers, as people with lessons to learn as well as to give, then they would not feel so unjustifiably afraid of exposing themselves to the unexpected.

The most important place to begin using this new communications approach, I am convinced, is in terms of project evaluation. As now conducted, most project evaluation is purely quantitative--how many people did (or were done to) how much of what over such-and-such a period of time. But in development terms, the most important questions usually concern who did it and why (or else why they did not do it). Only the qualitative questions really indicate what the source of the change is, what people are learning, and how deep their commitment to it is. Statistics help, but you really need to know what is happening in people's hearts and heads.

If we know about the recipients of our aid programs only through other people, we deny those who are aided the opportunity to be honest with us in the way that speaking directly affords. And that in turn denies us the chance to have new ideas or to modify our existing ideas and programs. Filtered feedback commits development to a lock-step where it can only do what it has already done. Direct feedback opens the door to a creative, two-way learning process where development becomes a truly collaborative enterprise.

In this context I remember an experience several years ago when I was making a program in Colombia with men who had had a vasectomy. This particular project had handled 125 vasectomies in the preceeding months, which the planners evaluating the project felt was as much success as anyone could expect. They cited the church's opposition to birth control and the male machismo as factors that militated against a more sizable program.

When I made a videotape with the men who had been through the program, however, quite a different perspective emerged. It turned out that while church leaders might see the men's action as anti-church, the men themselves did not; they had decided on vasectomies essentially because they loved their wives and wanted to share the responsibility for family planning. While their values in this matter differed from the church's, they were equally committed to honoring home and family. As for the machismo argument, a brief but penetrating discussion between a lawyer and a bricklayer on the program showed that the view of machismo of the evaluators was about a decade out of date.

The men completed the discussion by saying that the word about vasectomy really was not out yet, and that many more men would be interested in the procedure if they knew about it. And this from men whom the project's administrators had feared would be unwilling to make public statement at all about their vasectomies! Once the videotaped program made the actual situation clear, the project's grant was renewed and it went on to greater success.

I think it is fair to say that nothing of significance can happen in development without communication in this new mode. Only then can you begin to tap the energies involved in people finding their own solutions. The greater need is to provide tools than to provide directions. I use videotape as such a tool, a technology that affords a far more effective way for people to exchange experiences and ideas than through the maze of policy or through piles of papers.

In closing I would just say that it is important to see the information exchanged between people as a renewable expanding resource, not as a limited commodity. If the latter view prevails, everyone becomes concerned with protecting the body of information from change or "corruption" or any form of local adaptation. With the former view, information is but raw material to be utilized in different ways in different contexts. And because information--often embodied in the form of individual experience--is a wealth rather than a scarcity, it is not necessary that we agree, only that we share. Agreement is a traffic in exclusive options--we agree or we do not agree. Sharing opens an infinity of degrees. With a multiplicity of choices, such sharing is the only kind of communication that will truly contribute to human growth and development.